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ABSTRACT

The importance and varieties of human touch have been the subject of much research. Touching varies from culture to culture and is a way of talking in most Latin American countries. Three Puerto Rican novels provide examples of this nonverbal communicative style: "Mambru se fue a la guerra," by Jose Luis Gonzalez; "La vispera del hombre," by Rene Marques; and "Usmail," by Pedro Juan Soto. These novels contain many references to nonverbal communication, particularly touch. In varying degrees, the books offer examples of R. Heslin's categories of touching behavior: (1) functional-professional; (2)social-polite; (3) friendship-warmth; (4) love-intimacy; and (5) sexual arousal. The evolution of some of the characters' relationships also reflect tactile courtship behaviors described by researchers in haptics, the communicative aspect of touching. (Thirty-one references are attached.) (SG)

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REACH OUT AND TOUCH SOMEONE: TACTILE COMMUNICATION IN SELECTED PUERTO RICAN NOVELS

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REACH OUT AND TOUCH SOMEONE: TACTILE COMMUNICATION IN SELECTED PUERTO RICAN NOVELS

Recent advertisements of the telephone company have urged us to "Reach out and touch someone." Of course, this touch is a safe touch--by telephone--no physical contact required. The importance of touch and the varieties of human touch have been the subject of much research. Some studies, such as those by Montagu (1978), Bowlby (1951), Malandro and Barker (1983), and Burgoon and Saine (1978), demonstrate that touch is essential to our development, growth, and well-being and that tactile deprivation can produce such negative consequences as violence and death.

In addition, various aspects of haptics, the study of the communicative aspects of touch, have been examined. Researchers have looked at such variables as frequency of contact (Jourard, 1966), types of touch (Heslin, 1974), and culture (Nine-Curt, 1976; O'Mara, 1985).

Like all aspects of nonverbal communication, touching varies from culture to culture. For example, Sidney Jourard (1966) counted the frequency of contact between couples in cafes in San Juan, Puerto Rico, Paris, London, and Gainesville, Florida. The number of contacts per hour ranged from 180 in Puerto Rico to zero in London.

According to reports cited by Pogrebin (1986),

> Indonesians, as compared with Australians, and Latins, as opposed to Anglos, stand closer and do more touching and more smiling. Mediterraneans, Near Easterners, Far Easterners, and Americans all exhibit different patterns of touching and touch avoidance. Middle Easterners and French people touch each other in public much more than do Americans (p. 164).

Nine-Curt observes that touching is a way of talking in most Latin countries. Samovar (1981) mentions that some cultures are highly tactile (Hispanic-American, Italian, French, and Arab) while other cultures use very little touching in public (English, British-American, German). However, all Spanish speakers cannot be classified together. Shuter (1976) noted that as one moves southward from Central America the amount of touching decreases. This is also noted by Nine-Curt, who talks about the formality of Hispanic-Americans in Bogota, Mexico City, La Paz, and Lima, areas settled mostly by Castilians. This contrasts with the informality of the Caribbeans, descendants of settlers from southern and coastal Spain.

Two good examples of the highly tactile culture of most Latin American countries are provided by Nine-Curt (1976):

> My interest in gestures and other non-verbal ways of communicating in Puerto Rico came from my own experience upon returning from a three year stay in the States. When I met my old friends again, I noticed that I had the sensation that they were too close to me. I was also startled by the fact that they constantly touched me (friends of my own sex) while talking to me. I also perceived I was a little annoyed by their kissing. Then, I understood what was happening to me, I was looking at them as a native American would, not as a Puerto Rican (p. 10).

> Latins touch to a degree that is outrageous and threatening and oftentimes insulting to most Anglos. In fact, touching is also a way of "talking" in most Latin countries. Take a normal everyday greeting among Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, you name them. If you have already met, if you are friends, there is constant touching and slapping of backs, kissing and rubbing of bodies. If two women of the same age and social status meet, there is hugging, kissing and rubbing of upper part of bodies in some cases. If men of the same age and social status meet, there is the beating of backs, a hug maybe and the firm shaking of hands (p.22).

Similar examples from real life could be offered by any of us who have traveled in Puerto Rico or have had Puerto Rican students in class. These examples would substantiate studies regarding frequency and type of touch. However, it is more difficult to find examples of touching in more intimate situations in real life. Therefore, in this paper examples of touching behavior in general, and touching in courtship and in intimate situations in particular, will be examined and related to findings in these areas. Three Puerto Rican novels have been used to provide the examples.

According to Walter Ulrich (1986), "the use of fiction to illustrate principles of human communication is not new" (p. 143). He cites several articles to make his case (Shields & Kidd, 1973; Chase & Kneupper, 1974; Fisher & Filloy, 1982; Hugenberg & Schaefermeyer, 1983; Kougl, 1983; Hopper, Mandelbaum & Ragan, 1984, and Ragan & Hopper, 1984). Ulrich also notes that scholars in other fields have turned to fiction in order to increase their understanding of human behavior. Berger (1977), asserts that "the novel has contributed to a knowledge of the same landscape upon which social science has focused, but through a different lens" (p. 6).

This paper will examine three Puerto Rican novels in order to note the occurrence (description) of touching behaviors and to relate the examples to research and theories about touching. The literary works chosen were Mambrú se fue a la guerra by José Luis González, La víspera del hombre by René Marqués, and Usmaíl by Pedro Juan Soto. Before discussing the examples of touching found in the novels, a brief description of each will be presented in an attempt to provide an overview for those who may not be familiar with the works selected.

La víspera del hombre, written in 1959 by René Marqués, describes the passage of the protagonist, Pirulo, from childhood, through adolescence, to early manhood. Marqués also describes life in the mountains and on the coast in the 1930's, evokes scenes from Puerto Rico's past, and ponders the political future of Puerto Rico. Like La víspera del hombre, Usmaíl, written in 1985 by Pedro Juan Soto, describes the passage of the main character, Usmaíl, from childhood to early manhood. The novel, which takes place primarily on Vieques, evokes aspects of that island's history and describes the problems it encountered in the period from about 1930 to 1950, namely, unemployment and the growing military presence of the United States. The novel also deals with the problem of race and the political relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico. In Mambrú se fue a la guerra, written in 1972 by José Luis González, the narrator, Joe (José) describes his experiences in World War II in France, his return to the mainland United States after the war, and his subsequent return to Paris. Throughout the novel, José, the narrator, tries to deal with the problems of being a Puerto Rican American.

Before proceeding to the analyses of the examples of touching in these works, it will be useful to review some findings and theories about nonverbal communication in general and about touching in particular.

The functions of nonverbal communication have been described by researchers. For example, Larry Samovar (1981) includes the following functions of nonverbal behavior: (1) the formation of first impressions, (2) relational messages (including the degree of liking or disliking of the other person or the relationship), (3) the expression of affective or emotional states, (4) the means of presenting oneself to others, and (5) a way of influencing others.

Touching may be positive or negative. For example, the third function of nonverbal communication mentioned by Samovar, the expression of emotional states, illustrates this. A hug, a positive touch, may indicate affection, warmth, and/or comfort. However, a hug forced on a weaker person or one of lower status, might be perceived as a negative touch, as would a slap or a punch. If touch is used reciprocally, it indicates solidarity among people and reinforces the bonds of friendship or love. However, if touch is used unilaterally, it is seen negatively, as an assertion of power (Henley, 1973; Summerhayes and Schner, 1978).

In addition to the functions of nonverbal communication, which includes touch, researchers have indicated that there are different types of touch. For example, Heslin (1974) has classified touching behavior into five categories, based on the nature of the interpersonal relationship: (1) functional-professional; (2) social-polite;

(3) friendship-warmth; (4) love-intimacy; (5) sexual arousal. In the first catefory, functional-professional, touch is used on an impersonal level, such as a physician examining a patient or a tailor with a customer. The person being touched is seen almost as an object. The social-polite touch serves to communicate a limited form of interpersonal involvement, usually restricted by the social rules of the culture. The social-polite touch, for example a handshake, neutralizes the status differential between two persons. The friendship-warmth touch sees people touching each other as individuals, not merely as objects or social roles. This type of touching is oriented toward the other person as a friend. Heslin contends that in this category the greatest cross-cultural variablity occurs. Love-intimacy touching may include caressing the cheek, hugging, embracing, and other forms of touching that signal a particularly close emotional attachment, such as the relationship between intimate lovers and spouses. Heslin's fifth category, sexual arousal touch, the most intense, is often equated with the love-intimacy category. However, sexual arousal touch may be seen as an expression of physical attraction only, that is, the other person is a sex object.

In addition to Heslin's model of touch in various kinds of relationships, there are models of behaviors leading to interpersonal relationships. Touching behaviors are included in these models, along with other types of nonverbal communication. Schlefen (1965) has provided a model of what he refers to as "quasi-courtship" behavior. The model consists of four stages: (1) courtship readiness; (2) preening behavior; (3) postural cues, and (4) appeals to

invitation. Preening includes self-touching behaviors, such as stroking the hair, rearranging makeup, and adjusting clothing. Nielsen (1964) reports that Birdwhistell suggested that there are twenty-four steps in the courtship dance of the North American adolescent. These steps have a definite order. For example, if a male does not receive a favorable response when he holds the female's hand, he cannot go on to the next step, intertwining his fingers with hers. Morris (1977) notes that many signs (warm gestures) are used to indicate liking. Warm gestures include small touching movements, such as letting a hand rest against the other's body. In addition, Morris describes a sequence of twelve steps that couples go through from initial contact to intimacy. Each step, aside from the first three, involves some kind of touching. Knapp (1980) explains this sequence:

> Morris believes that heterosexual couples in Western culture normally go through a sequence of steps, like the courtship patterns of other animals, on the road to sexual intimacy. Notice the predominant nonverbal theme: (1) eye to body, (2) eye to eye, (3) voice to voice, (4) hand to hand, (5) arm to waist, (7) mouth to mouth, (8) hand to head, (9) hand to body, (10) mouth to breast, (11) hand to genitals, (12) genitals to genitals and/or mouth to genitals. Morris believes that these steps generally follow the same order although he admits there are variations (p. 21).

Having reviewed the various aspects of haptics research, we can now turn our attention to the novels. Although there are many references to nonverbal communication in La víspera del hombre, there is a preponderance of references to touching, reflecting perhaps the highly tactile Puerto Rican culture. As mentioned earlier, Samovar notes five functions of nonverbal communication. The predominant functions of touch found in La víspera del hombre are a

way of influencing others (pp. 17, 107, 119, 214), relational messages (pp. 19, 29, 94) and the expression of emotional states. Touch is used to express fear (p. 24), love (pp. 46, 47, 158, 181, 279), friendship (pp. 101, 107), anger (p. 267), comfort (pp. 29, 119, 215, 268, 271, 274), and affection (pp. 19, 24).

For example, let us look at how a touch on the shoulder has been used. Early in the book, Pirulo's mother grasps her son's shoulder in fear, trying to control and comfort herself. When the threatening situation is over, Marqués notes that she had "tortured" the shoulder (p. 24). Later on, don Rafa puts his hand on Pirulo's shoulder to comfort him. The touch indicates don Rafa's status and also his affection for the boy (p. 29). In addition, a touch is often used to persuade (Willis and Hamm, 1980), and don Rafa was trying to persuade Pirulo as well as console him about the necessity of having had to sell the coffee plantation.

In addition, all of Heslin's categories except functional-professional are represented. For example, there are three episodes where touch is used for the love-intimacy and sexual arousal categories (pp. 46, 168, 219). When these episodes were examined to see how well the twelve-steps sequence was followed, we found some reflection of the pattern described by Morris. For example, the night of love of the Indian warrior and the Indian princess begins with the warrior's hand touching the shoulder of the princess (p. 46). In the other two episodes, the sexual intimacy is preceded by the eye-to-body, eye-to-eye, voice-to-voice, hand-to-body, and mouth-to-mouth step mentioned by Morris.

The second novel, Usmaíl, also contains many references to touching. As in La víspera del hombre three of the five functions of touch mentioned by Samovar are found: (1) relational messages ((pp. 114, 141, 161, 211, 219, 268, 306, 307); (2) a way of influencing others (pp. 161, 202, 306) and (3) the expression of emotional states, such as passion/desire (pp. 41, 42, 240), comfort (pp. 100, 203, 214, 236, 259, 282).

Four of the five types of touch categorized by Heslin are found in Usmaíl. As in La víspera del hombre, there are no examples of the functional-professional touch. Examples of the social-polite type are a handshake when saying good-bye to a teacher (p. 211) and a handshake to seal a business agreement (p. 219). Unlike La víspera del hombre, Usmaíl contains many examples of negative touch, such as slapping (p. 202), biting (p. 240) and fighting (p. 142). In addition, many sexual encounters include negative touch in the form of physical violence (pp. 240, 244, 279, 304).

In Mambrú se fue a la guerra touch is noted primarily in the friendship warmth, love-intimacy and sexual arousal categories of Heslin. The most interesting examples are the two encounters between Joe and two women, Marie and Maruja. In these instances, touches are in the love-intimacy and sexual arousal categories. The encounter with the French woman, Marie, is mainly the sexual arousal type. Many of Morris' twelve steps are noted, including mouth-to-mouth, hand-to-head, hand-to-body, and genitals-to-genitals (pp. 14-21).

However, the encounter with Maruja includes more touching in the love-intimacy category. Maruja rests her arm on Joe's arm when asking him to accompany her home from a party. As they walk and talk, she gets closer and rests her head on his shoulder. When he takes her hand, which is one of the twenty-four steps in Birdwhistell's "courtship dance," she does not withdraw it. This gives Joe what Birdwhistell calls a favorable response, letting him proceed to the next step. In the sexual encounter several of Morris' twelve steps are explicitly noted such as eye-to-body, eye-to-eye, and voice-to-voice (pp. 91-97; 106-114).

Thus, in our examination of the occurrence of touching found in three Puerto Rican novels, we have found examples to illustrate many facets of the work done by researchers and theorists in the field of haptics.

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